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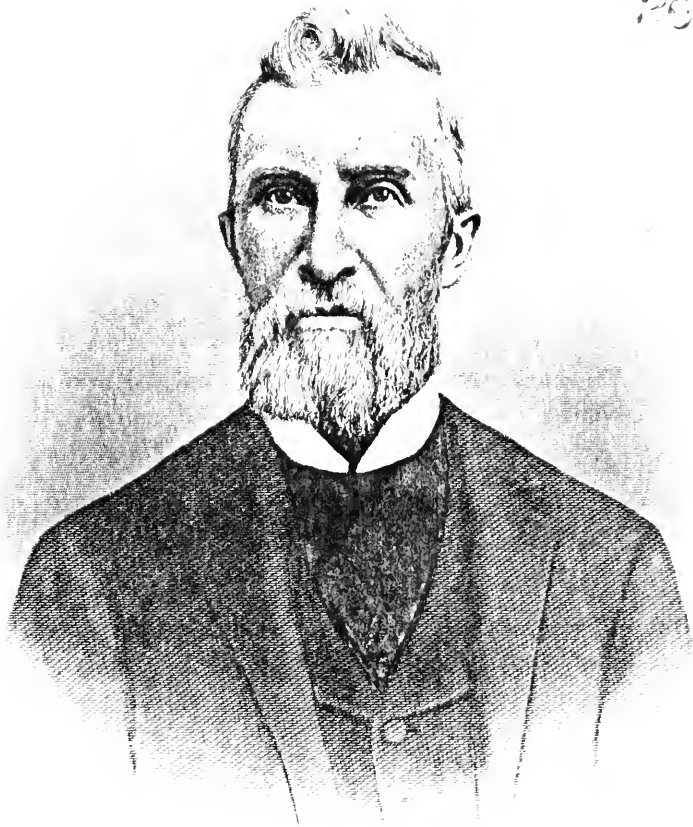
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AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF
EZRA GOODRICH

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Published while he was living and could see that it was correct.

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Ezra Goodrich

EZRA GOODRICH

Ezra Goodrich was born at Alfred, N. Y., February 24, 1826. He was the only son of Joseph and Nancy (Maxson) Goodrich.

Joseph Goodrich was the son of Uriah and Mary (Carpenter) Goodrich, was born May 12, 1800, at Hancock, Mass., and died October 9, 1867, at Milton, Wis.

Uriah Goodrich was the son of Elijah and Margaret (Gillett) Goodrich, was born August 24, 1767, at Hancock, Mass., and died September 2, 1845, at Alfred, N. Y.

Elijah Goodrich was the son of Jacob and Benedict (Goodwin) Goodrich, was born July 3, 1724, at Windsor, Conn., and died October 3, 1791, at Hancock, Mass.

Jacob Goodrich was the son of John and Rebecca (Allen) Goodrich, was born November 27, 1694, at Wethersfield, Conn., and died May 11, 1764, at Windsor, Conn.

John Goodrich was the son of William and Sarah (Marvin) Goodrich, was born May 20, 1653, at Wethersfield, Conn., and died September 5, 1730, at Wethersfield, Conn.

William Goodrich was one of the Pilgrims from England, and was a descendant of the founder of "Goodrich Court" and "Goodrich Castle," built during the feudal ages in Herfordshire, England.

Ezra Goodrich had an only sister, Jane (Goodrich) Davis, who was born February 6, 1828, at Alfred, N. Y., and died August 22, 1903, at Rockford, Ill.



GOODRICH CASTLE.

January 30, 1839, his father, Joseph Goodrich, left Alfred, N. Y., with four teams with wagons mounted on sleighs, in snow that was four feet deep, to come to Wisconsin by the overland route. There were twelve persons in the party, including passengers and hired help. One of the sleighs tipped over the first day of the journey and his mother's collarbone was broken in a way that the surgeons could not set it and keep it in place; and she rode all the long journey with it loose in a sling.

In Ohio they crossed the great "Maumee Swamp," which was 30 miles wide, with an emigrant tavern and ox teams to each mile of the horrible road, to pull the pioneers out as they got stuck in the mud.

In crossing the Calumet river near Chicago one team broke through the ice and a horse was drowned. In Chicago all the streets were one vast sea of black mud. They had to ford the Desplaines river and many other flood-swollen streams; and they



Joseph H. Goodrich

finally arrived at Prairie du Lac, where Milton now is, March 4; being thirty-four days in cold winter weather on the long road.

In a little building, 16 by 20, which is still standing, they all lived, including James Pierce, a family of thirteen; and they kept a store and travelers besides. Only a part of the teams were sheltered out under an open shed.

The Black Hawk and the Gen. Atkinson army trails were still fresh, and passed a little west of the house. No roads were laid out there then. Janesville had but one log house, the residence of its founder, H. F. Janes. Fort Atkinson had but one log house, the residence of Dwight Foster.

Watertown had two houses, and a sawmill owned by Mr. Goodhue. Waupum had but one log house, the residence of Mr. Wilcox, and Fond du Lac had but one house, the residence of Dr. Darling.

His father finding that his claim was on an air line from Chicago to Madison, and from Janesville to Fort Atkinson, decided to found a village where these two lines crossed, and draw these roads when they were laid to it. He platted and gave for public use a large public square, he gave lots to mechanics who would settle and build there, gave grounds for a church, a district school, an academy and a cemetery.

He built an academy and maintained it alone for the first ten years.

He was the first landlord, the first merchant, first postmaster, and first town treasurer in the town.

He left his home farm and his property in the village of Milton to his son, Ezra Goodrich, who came into possession at his death in the fall of 1867.

To his daughter he gave his other farms and lands in different parts of the state. One of the first things that Ezra Goodrich did was to enlarge and fit up the cemetery lot; and erect an enduring monument to the memory of his father and mother, in which he expended \$1,500.

The buildings left him in the village were all old and out of date. The roof to the old Goodrich Block had rotted so that half of it fell in, and the back walls half of them fell out the winter after his father died. It was a massive and a miserable wreck. To repair it would cost all it was worth, and to abandon it would advertise Milton as a dead town. The property was entailed to him, a

live village was of interest to him, and to repair the old buildings seemed the only thing he could do.

And he expended over \$3,000 in this work. To keep them in repair so they would rent and repay cost and interest and taxes had been a constant struggle with him. It cost him \$1,000 to defend the contest of his father's will, although every word was in his father's own handwriting.

When Ezra Goodrich came to Wisconsin, he was but a slender lad of thirteen years.

He was quick and active and the only son, and his father's business kept him constantly employed; so much so that it was difficult for him to get much benefit from the primitive schools.

His education was therefore of the rough and ready sort, such as he gathered up in practical life and on the road, where his father kept him much of the time.

In his first business enterprise he with others engaged in the mercantile trade in Milton, dealing in dry goods, groceries, crockery, hardware, clothing, boots and shoes, iron and steel, buffalo robes and many other things.

They did an extensive business, in which he continued for ten years.

He took an active interest in the public enterprises of the town. He was a man of strong convictions and was ready to defend the side which he believed was right, and to condemn a thing which he thought was wrong; which made him warm friends and bitter enemies.

One of the first hot contests he had was over the election of the first board of trustees of Milton College when it was organized under the charter granted by the state.

The contention was whether the Seventh-day people or the Sunday people should have the majority of the trustees.

All conceded the school would need the patronage of both, and no one contended to have any sectarianism taught in the school. Yet both were anxious to have the control.

It was to be controlled by the stock, and the side that could raise the most money would have the most stock, and could control the school. Money in Milton was then a scarce thing, and hard to be got.

A hundred dollars of ready money could be raised easier now

than one dollar could then. Robert F. Frasier, a man of ability and large experience, backed by a friend from New York who had the money, canvassed the country for stock for one side; and Ezra Goodrich for the other. And both sides got in some lively work; and each day they compared notes; and the result was about an even thing. The day fixed for the election came.

A Sunday man was chosen as secretary and Ezra Goodrich as treasurer. The stock books were declared closed, and a resolution passed that twenty-five per cent. on each share of stock should be paid before a subscriber could vote. Ezra Goodrich furnished his friends who had not the money to pay on their stock.

Money never rolled into a treasury in Milton as fast on a subscription paper, since or before. The result was the Seventh-day people won by the skin of their teeth. But they never saw the records or the stock subscription papers again. The other side had all the papers and records, and Goodrich's side had the money, and his friends' faces all wore a broad grin. 2016581

Another struggle in which all were interested was to fill the quota for Milton with soldiers for the great Rebellion.

Money was still then a scarce article, and it took no small amount to get the number required. The effort to raise sufficient money, after a long struggle and repeated public meetings, was finally declared a failure, and they resolved to refund the money that was raised to the subscribers, and let the draft come.

Goodrich then asked them to adjourn for a week, until he canvassed the town, which he volunteered to do. He found it like squeezing blood out of a dry stick, but he stuck to it, until he got it, and the town quota was filled.

Another hot contest was in locating the present site for the Milton High School. In this he was warmly opposed by a goodly number of the leading citizens, including the managers of Milton College. They kept a lobby at Madison to oppose the enactment of the act to authorize locating it on the public square. And, in fact, they called a school meeting when Goodrich was absent in Chicago to remove the site, after \$1,000 had been expended and the basement was built.

But he left his little boys alone in Chicago and came home and busted the business.

They wanted to locate the school house at the west side of the

village, on a three-cornered lot that is still vacant, south of the railroad and the steam mill. But all now agree in the fact that Milton has got the finest district school grounds to be found in the state.

Ezra Goodrich platted the grounds, superintended setting out the trees, drew the plan and specifications, and superintended erecting the original school building there. He also superintended setting out the trees in the tidy little park north of the railroad, and of setting out posts around both of the parks, to protect the trees. In fact he brought from Bark River woods, and sold all the first shade trees that were set out in the town.

He secured the purchase of land to double the size of Milton Cemetery, the means to fence it and he superintended the setting out the trees in it and around it, and he got the lot owners where burials were made before the grounds were platted to so change the graves that alleys and walks could be opened around each lot. He removed the yards and gates and old rail pens that surrounded a portion of the lots; and he inaugurated the system of grading up the lots, removing lilac bushes and uncouth shrubs, and having their lawns mowed, so they were covered with bright green grass.

Milton now has one of the finest little village cemeteries in the state.

He was the first one to advocate using gravel for grading the roads, and, after much opposition, he succeeded in securing annual special appropriations for graveling the roads in the town for more than thirty years. And Milton now has more miles of road that are good at all seasons of the year than any rural town in the state. If the system is continued for a few more years, she will have a graveled road to every farm in the town, which is the object Goodrich has been working for. And the traveler in the muddy season can now readily tell, by the road, when he reaches the town line of Milton, though many other towns are now following suit.

Many years ago he began to advocate having but two public schools in the town, (one in each village;) and gathering the children of the other districts in town, and bringing them to these central schools, where they could have a teacher for each grade or class, instead of only one teacher to instruct all classes. He claimed they could better afford to carry the children to such a school, than they could to carry their milk to the factory.

In this as in many other schemes, he at first was strenuously opposed, by the outlying districts of the town; but such opposition is now rapidly wearing away, the small districts are running down, and their children are flocking to the village High Schools, where competent teachers are fitting them for the ordinary avocations of life.

He was for many years an ardent supporter of Milton College, and has always deemed the College an important factor in the make-up of Milton; but his active interest was destroyed by his loss of confidence in President Whitford, who controlled its management for many years and up to the time of his death.

Mr. Goodrich had placed the most implicit confidence in Mr. Whitford from the time he came to Wisconsin, a period of many years; and when he found he had been so long and so wonderfully deceived it shook his confidence in all humanity. Mr. Whitford came to Milton when a young man, fresh from college and entirely destitute of worldly means. He was full of enthusiasm and had chosen the ministry for his profession and Milton for the field of his work. All of which elicited Mr. Goodrich's interest in him, and won his confidence and friendship and his warmest support.

Mr. Whitford was chosen pastor of the Milton S. D. B. Church, and Mr. Goodrich was ready and willing and anxious to do anything and everything he could to help him in his beneficent work.

The early settlers in Wisconsin, of this faith and order, in choosing their homes in the new country, were scattered over a wide field; and Mr. Whitford with commendable zeal was anxious to look them all up, and gather them into the Milton Church, as far as he could. Mr. Goodrich kept a livery in Milton stocked with better horses than have since ever been kept; and he furnished Mr. Whitford with horses and carriages free for over three years, the time of his pastoral work; and Mr. Whitford usually kept a rig running lively from three to four days in the week.

No such thorough pastoral work was ever done in Milton; and it showed its fruitage by more than doubling the membership of the church.

Unfortunately, a vacancy was made in the presidency of Milton College, and Mr. Whitford was chosen, to change his field, and take up the management of the College work.

Like many good pastors and most college professors, Mr. Whit-

ford was not a good financier; and, unfortunately, he was allowed to manage the College finances.

The College was in need of more room, and Mr. Whitford was entrusted with the raising of means, and the erection of an addition to the College building.

Mr. Whitford also, at the same time, erected for himself a fine brick residence; which led to the promiscuous intermingling of labor and of all kinds of material, in erecting, side by side at the same time, the two brick buildings. Mr. Whitford was restricted by the trustees from running the College in debt, but finding the cost of the addition far exceeded his subscriptions, he avoided this restriction by running *himself* in debt, borrowing money at the bank; but, he got three of the trustees to endorse his note. This note was renewed from time to time, until the bank declined to extend it any longer; and a financial crisis came, and the faces of the three trustees wore an elongated look.

A meeting was hurriedly called and a committee of three good men was chosen and sent out to canvass the whole community and try to raise the means to pay the indebtedness.

This committee went out and did the best that they could, and they succeeded in getting only twenty dollars; while the note in the bank was fifteen hundred dollars, and there was twenty-five hundred dollars other indebtedness.

The people were utterly discouraged, and they felt it was useless to try to float the ship longer. Mr. Goodrich realizing if the College went down, it was the downfall of Milton, determined to make the effort of his life, and see if he could avert the impending calamity.

He had just completed a new brick residence, and he concluded to get up a big house warming, and get everybody out that he thought he could interest in contributing a dollar; not letting them know what he was after.

He arranged to illuminate the thirty-three windows with two lights to the window, he provided tables to seat 150 persons at a time, he fitted rooms with shelves and attendants for checking their wraps, he got 300 chairs from the factory, and he invited 300 guests. He gave them all a good supper, which was followed with good music, and he got the crowd to feeling happy and good natured about as he wanted them to be.

He had not let but half a dozen know what he really was after; and they had kept the secret. At the opportune time he gathered these half dozen friends around him, and in a few brief words he told the people his real object in gathering them together.

He told them the condition of Mr. Whitford and of the College, and of the fix the three trustees were in; and he said that we owed it to them, to the college, to Milton, to the community, and to ourselves, to all help them out to the best of our ability. He called on President Whitford to follow him, which he did in heartbroken and soul-feeling words, and with his face all flooded with tears. And then he called out the Rev. Darwin E. Maxson, who electrified the whole mass of people with a magnetic speech. Mr. Goodrich then headed a subscription paper with a gift of \$2,300.00, of which \$1,200.00 (an undivided half of forty acres of land on the bluff) was to start an endowment fund; and he then asked others to follow suit. The scheme worked like magic, and he has ever looked back on the gratifying result, as the crowning event of his protracted and eventful life. He expended \$400.00 in this event. He gave Mr. Whitford the money to pay his note at the bank the next day.

And during the succeeding week he raised the subscriptions to exceeding \$13,000.00, of which \$5,000.00 was for an endowment fund. Over \$4,000.00 of indebtedness was paid during the year, which it was supposed would wipe the debts all out. But in the meantime Mr. Whitford had called on the finance committee to return him his financial report; which he kept for over a year, and when he finally returned it, it showed that there was still exceeding over \$4,000.00 indebtedness.

And then and there the quill between Whitford and Goodrich split.

The Rev. Daniel Babcock had died and left a legacy of \$1,000.00 to Milton College, to found a library to be known as the "Daniel Babcock Library."

Mr. Whitford borrowed this money of the administrator, and then he induced the College trustees to invest over \$500.00 of it in his old books, including many books which by rights belonged to the College rather than to him, as they were sent to the College by members of Congress. And to cap the climax many of the

books were taken at exorbitant prices, three or four times as much as they would cost in the open market.

And Mr. Goodrich raised a breeze over the matter.

At a trustees' meeting, from which he asked to be excused to go over to the library and look at some of these books, while he was absent, they hastily adjourned the trustees' meeting and called a stockholders' meeting, in which they dropped Mr. Goodrich from the board of trustees, and elected a man in his place who did not own a dollar of stock in the College. At the time for the next annual stockholders' meeting for electing trustees, no meeting was called or held, as they mistakenly thought Goodrich would be there and endeavor to be elected a trustee again.

Mr. Goodrich never for a moment desired to be a college trustee again, and never attended another stockholders' meeting.

During the second year after he was dropped, enough watered stock was issued to control all subsequent elections after the Jay Gould fashion.

In 1876, the year of the "Centennial Exhibition," Mr. Whitford wrote and published a history of Milton College, to be deposited there; in which he gave a list of the stockholders, and the amount of stock which each one had paid and held.

In this list he credited Ezra Goodrich with having but \$225, when in fact he owned and held at that time \$3,625, of which 92 shares of \$25 each, making \$2,300, were issued to him by President Whitford himself.

Such infamous perfidy, such egregious and intentional falsifying; and such base ingratitude to a benefactor, Mr. Goodrich had never before or has he since, seen or heard of, or met.

The above simple and plain facts are the cause of what may have seemed to be a want of interest on the part of Mr. Goodrich in the affairs of Milton College, for a long series of years.

He still has the college stock to prove the truth of the assertions he makes; and when he dies he will leave the same where it may be shown by his heirs or executor. He has never bought or sold or in any way transferred a share of College stock, although he has long ago ceased to have any desire to have anything to do with the College management.

He is glad, however, to see Milton College kept afloat by those

who are younger in years and in college experience, than he has been.

October 14, 1852, Ezra Goodrich was married to Elizabeth L. Ensign near Binghamton, N. Y., and they had four children, Joseph C. Goodrich, born June 24, 1854, at Milton, Wis.; William H. Goodrich, born February 15, 1856, at Milton, Wis.; Mary E. Goodrich (Post), born March 23, 1859, at Milton, Wis.; Anna S. Goodrich (Davis), born June 18, 1861, at Milton, Wis. April 23, 1892, his devoted and beloved wife died, at Milton, Wis. October 16, 1903, he was married to Mrs. Charlotte M. (Morgan) Little, at Milton Junction, Wis., with whom he still lives at Milton Junction.

His father being the founder of Milton, and her father, I. P. Morgan, one of the founders of Milton Junction, their marriage to some extent has blended the interests of these two pleasant little villages together.

Upon the death of his father in 1867, Mr. Goodrich turned his attention to the farm which was left to his keeping and the village property before referred to.

There was but about 75 acres of the farm under cultivation, and this land was badly run down. The balance was second growth timber filled with thick underbrush, marsh land covered with willows, lakes, and shallow ponds filled with musk-rat houses, mud-turtles' nests and cat-tail flags, there being about 350 acres in all.

Mr. Goodrich determined to try and reclaim more cultivated land. He cleared off and grubbed out a part of the timber land which he broke up and got under cultivation, and he dug out the willows and plowed and tiled the marshes; and he made a big ditch across the farm and drained the shallow ponds. And he covered the old worn-out land with muck and shells from Storrs Lake, and he bought and added to the farm 40 acres of land. He erected buildings down at the back end of the farm for keeping a hundred head of cattle, two hundred hogs and a dozen horses. Also cribs for 5,000 bushels of corn and a granary for 3,000 bushels of grain, with houses for poultry, a milk-house and cellars for roots. With a commodious house for a dwelling, and ample pastures for cattle and horses and hogs. And the farm has over 200 acres of meadow and plow-land.

He stocked it for many years with high-bred Jersey cows, which gave him much pleasure, and he had ready sale for their cream in Chicago. But hired help becoming so high and scarce and so unreliable for milking the cows, he finally changed off and kept steers for beef.

But he found the home butchers preferred cow beef at the price, and that the railroads and stockyards and the packers in Chicago, all combined against the farmer, came too near being robbers to suit an old man like him, and so he hired out the farm and quit.

He has since kept interested in seeing how nicely they made the crops and the stock grow, that they kept the noxious weeds from growing (that is, as much as may be), in providing supplies for repairs to the fences and buildings, and in putting in modern cement floors for the cattle, the hogs and the feed yards. Of late he has expended much money in making ditches and dikes to carry the surplus water on to Lake Koshkanong, that gathers from many miles and crosses his farm. He has a graveled private road and a telephone line a mile and a half long, back to his "Sunnyside Farm."

Since the death of his father, Mr. Goodrich has kept so many irons in the fire, at a time, that he was loaded down heavily with debts, which he carried for many years; and, as he looks back now, he wonders that he ever dug out. He paid over \$5,000 interest on one \$3,000 debt.

He is thankful that he lived to get out O. K. and he warns all others to keep out if they can.

It cost Rock County a couple of thousand dollars in court expenses to find out for sure that Ezra Goodrich told the truth. The Rev. W. C. Whitford sued him for libel, claiming \$10,000 damages; and he had him put under \$8,000 bail to keep out of jail. The trial in court lasted twenty-two days.

Mr. Goodrich proved to the judge and the jury that he had told the truth, the truth only, and not half of the damaging truth that he knew and could prove.

His expense in this suit was another thousand dollars, but it did him more than ten thousand dollars' good. But, like paying

interest, his advice to all is, to keep out of a lawsuit, unless forced into it as a defendant. But we must come to a close.

We have seen a more marked change in Wisconsin than anyone hereafter will see. We have lived longer than any of our lineal ancestors.

We are thankful to an all-wise Creator for life and the many blessings we have enjoyed.

We have written our own biography, as no one else living could do the subject justice.

We have not written one event in a thousand that memory calls to mind.

But what we have written we believe is true.

It will not be for sale, but will be given free to all who may want it; to our friends and our foes alike, of which there are plenty of each.

Any one wanting a copy, by sending their address to him at Milton Junction, Wis., will receive one by mail.

EZRA GOODRICH.

February, 1908.

